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ABSTRACT

Data from a 1986 modified Delphi survey of adult education professionals in a 13-state region is used to determine what public policies were regarded as important and feasible for providing adequate opportunities for rural adults. The document focuses on 89 proposed policies to determine differences in perceptions among three subregions (Mountain, Plains and Northwest Coastal) and among respondents according to their roles (legislators, adult educators, college staff, cooperative extension personnel, state education agency personnel, rural school staff, regional education services staff and others. The study includes a list of 26 policies rated feasible and important for improving education opportunities for rural adults, and includes a list of 8 policies seen as important but less feasible. The study concludes that most respondents believe that the commitment of government to adult education is both important and feasible. According to the study, however, respondents do not believe such a commitment exists at present. (TES)

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OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO EDUCATION FOR RURAL ADULTS: A CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC POLICY PROPOSALS

by

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Overcoming Barriers to Education for Rural Adults: A Consideration of Public Policy Proposals

Introduction

Participants in the National Invitational Meeting on Rural Postsecondary Education, held in 1981, focused on the varied needs of their students and called for individual attention to their unique situations (Rural Postsecondary, 1981, unpaginated). Despite their individuality, however, rural citizens were seen as sharing the common difficulty of securing access to post secondary education programs suited to their needs. As recently as 1985, Barker found information on adult education programs for rural Americans to be "both incomplete and inadequate" (4).

McCannon (1983) noted that rural adults are "participating in educational programs at rates that are increasing faster than they are for their urban counterparts" (15). He cited data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (Kay, 1982) that showed that 27.6 percent of participants in adult education in 1981 were residents of rural communities. He pointed out that the rural population of the United States increased by 13 percent between 1975 and 1981, but that participation in adult education by rural residents increased by over 34 percent during the same period. Urban residents increased their participation in adult education by only 21 percent between 1975 and 1981 (15).

However, McCannon observed that significant barriers prevented more adults from attending educational programs. He reviewed several studies on barriers to adult education and concluded,

> There seems to be a general concensus among studies cited here that rural adult learners do experience significant barriers. The foremost barriers are distance and lack of prior educational attainment and available counseling services. Lack of family support and financial assistance are other barriers that rural learners face. (21)

McCannon also stated that there were regional differences among rural areas in the United States and differences in problems and needs. Low population density, he observed, is common to all rural areas. Of rural adult learners, their educational needs, and the barriers to education that confront them, McCannon said,

> . . . rural adult learners look like, act like, and learn like urban adult learners. The certified public accountant, the teacher, the electrician, the nurse, and the engineer in a small town must meet the same type of continuing education requirements for occupational recertification as their urban counterparts. The artist, the poet, the writer, and the actor create their works just as their urban counterparts do. Likewise, both the rural casual learner and the degree seeker embark on their educational journey with the same hopes, expectations, and fears as urban residents. So, there are little or no differences. Rural learners have a quest for knowledge, too--only the location of their residence differs. For some, the difference in residence

> can be a limiting factor. Resources, jobs, and educational services are fewer. But, for those who exhibit the characteristics of independence and self-direction, their residential status opens up a world of independent learning. (17)

Cross and McCartan (1984) identified three kinds of barriers to adult education:

> Situational barriers are those arising from one's situation in life at a given time. Lack of time because of responsibilities on the job or at home, for example, deters large numbers of potential learners aged 25 to 45. Lack of money deters young people and other low-income individuals; lack of child care deters young parents. Institutional barriers consist of all those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities--inconvenient schedules or locations, full-time fees for part-time study, inappropriate courses of study, for example. Dispositional barriers relate to people's attitudes and perceptions of themselves as learners. Many older citizens, for example, feel that they are too old to learn. Adults with poor educational backgrounds frequently lack interest in learning or confidence in their ability to learn. (37)

In another study, McCannon (1985) surveyed adults enrolled in five higher education institutions in rural settings in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. He found that distance, costs, time, and self-confidence were greater obstacles to women than to men and that conflicts with jobs and lack of desired courses were more frequently cited as obstacles by men. Both men

and women considered the need for financial aid, information, and time off from work as important factors affecting their participation in higher education. More women than men expressed the need for babysitting services, family support, and increased self-confidence. The respondents indicated a preference for late afternoon and evening courses, weekend courses, and "clustered" courses (courses in a program during a concentrated time once a week).

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) stated that informational and psychosocial barriers are "less obvious and in some ways more fundamental in accounting for participation or lack of participation" (137) in adult education than other types of barriers. They cited Johnstone and Rivera (1965) as evidence that knowledge of adult education resources varies with socioeconomic status and community size, low socioeconomic status and residence in rural areas being associated with lack of information. Darkenwald and Merriam also observed in the literature a link between psychosocial barriers, which were defined as "individually held beliefs, values, attitudes, or perceptions that inhibit participation in organized learning activities" (137), and low socioeconomic status.

Treadway (1984) identified the need for institutions of higher education to remove barriers by relating their institutional missions to rural residents. In addition, he

elaborated upon issues for both national and state policy. Those issues included:

1. an urban bias in the allocation of federal education dollars
2. a need to recognize the diversity of rural America in federal policy
3. a need for policy input at the federal level by rural educators
4. federal initiatives to develop and use communications technology for delivering educational programs to rural residents
5. federal support for the "systematic collection, compliation, and analysis of the status of participation in rural adult education" (61)
6. regionalization of state higher education policy making and administration
7. input by rural educators to state policy making
8. coordination of publicly-funded institutions of higher education that serve a given rural area

9. improved communications between state policy makers and rural constituents
10. reciprocity between or among states for state funding of out-of-state students
11. coordination of the rural development efforts of all agencies, public and private.

A team of researchers at Washington State University and the University of Idaho (McDaniel, 1986) surveyed providers of educational services for rural adults and 47 rural adult learners in Alaska, California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming to identify barriers to education. They found a similarity of perceived barriers among providers and learners across the seven-state region. The investigators classified barriers into the following categories: 1. personal/situational, 2. psychological, 3. informational, 4. institutional, and 5. state policy barriers. This research, an undertaking of the Northwest Action Agenda project, resulted in a set of 23 recommendations addressed to state educational policy makers, educational institutions, rural communities, and rural education practitioners. The investigators surmised:

> The single overriding area of agreement between educational providers and rural adult learners concerns the question of

> access to educational opportunities. Overwhelmingly, both groups feel that, when compared with their urban counterparts, the rural adult learner does not have equal access to educational programs. (15)

The conclusion of the Northwest Action Agenda project that barriers to rural adult education were not uniform across the seven-state region is relevant to the present study, since there is an overlap in both geographic and chronological parameters between the two.

Statement of the Problem

During the summer of 1986 a modified Delphi survey was inaugurated to determine barriers to educational programs that affect rural adults and changes and policies required to improve access to education for rural adults in the states of Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. According to United States Census figures (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1983), this region comprises about 47 percent of the land area of the nation, but contained less than nine percent of the country's population in 1980. The region had a population density of 11.9 people per square mile, compared with 64 per square mile for the United States as a whole. Survey respondents were 217 rural education researchers, community education personnel, rural adult educators, legislators, rural school

administrators, county extension agents, and others in the 13 states.

The focus of this paper is on the third (and final) round of the modified Delphi survey. The purpose of that portion of the investigation was to determine what public policies were regarded by knowledgeable persons as important and feasible for providing adequate educational opportunities for rural adults in the 13-state region.

Methodology

This study was conducted by means of a three-round modified Delphi survey. In the first round, participants were asked to list three to five responses for each of the following items: 1. barriers to education that exist for rural adults, 2. actions that are needed to provide adequate educational opportunities for rural adults, and 3. public policies that are needed to reduce barriers to education and/or improve educational opportunities for rural adults. Responses to the first two items were used to generate a 203-item questionnaire on barriers to education and actions required to provide adequate educational opportunities for rural adults for the second round of the modified Delphi survey. Responses to the third item were consolidated into 89 public policy statements to be evaluated by participants in the third round of the study.

The first round of the survey revealed 78 perceived barriers to education for rural adults that were

subsequently submitted to the participants for validation in the second round. The barriers were classified under five categories: personal/situational, psychological, informational, institutional, and political. First-round respondents also identified 125 actions they thought were needed to provide adequate educational opportunities for rural adults. Those actions related to institutional policies, interagency/interinstitutional coordination, curriculum, alternative delivery formats, information and publicity, funding, student services, instructional personnel, instructional support, and rural elementary and secondary education. In the second round of the survey, conducted in the spring of 1987, all participants were asked to judge the desirablity of the actions. One hundred ninety-six individuals responded.

The third-round survey was mailed to all 217 first-round participants in June 1987. The participants were asked to evaluate the importance of 89 statements of proposed policies on a five-point scale: 1 = "most unimportant," 2 = "unimportant," 3 = "moderately important," 4 = "important," 5 = "most important." The participants were also asked to rate the feasibility of each of the proposed policies, using the scale shown in Figure 1. Chi square analyses were conducted for each of the 89 policy

Figure 1

Feasibility Scale

5 = Definitely Feasible	* No hindrance to implementation * No research & development required * No political roadblocks * Acceptable to the public
4 = Probably Feasible	* Some indication this could be implemented * Some research & development still required * Further consideration or preparation to be given to political or public reaction
3 = May or May Not be Feasible	
2 = Probably Infeasible	* Some indications this is unworkable * Significant unanswered questions
1 = Definitely Infeasible	* All indications are negative * Unworkable * Cannot be implemented

statements to determine whether there were significant differences (.05 level) among the respondents in their perceptions of importance or feasibility that were related to their geographic locations or to the different roles they played in rural education.

Description of the Data

The present paper focuses on the importance and feasibility of 89 proposed public policies as perceived by 175 third-round respondents. Differences in perceptions among three sub-regions and among categories of respondents as determined by chi square tests of independence will be reported.

Importance of the Proposed Policies

Of the 89 public policy statements generated by the participants, 22 were judged either "important" or "most important" by at least 75 percent of the third-round respondents. Those statements are listed below with the percent of respondents who considered the policy "important" or "most important" shown in parentheses:

Federal and state commitments to adult literacy programs (89.7%)

State commitment to adult basic education (89.1%)

Reciprocity among colleges and universities serving rural areas so that credits may be easily transferred and applied to degree programs (88.0%)

Equal educational opportunity for all residents of a state (85.7%)

State subsidies for educational services in sparsely-populated areas (84.6%)

Removal from public assistance programs of provisions that penalize adults for enrolling in educational programs (84.6%)

Reverse current public assistance policy that penalizes adults on AFDC who wish to obtain further education (82.9%)

Coordinate educational programs for adults with current and projected demand for job skills (82.9%)

Provide rent-free space in pulbic educational facilities for adult basic education programs (81.7%)

School board policies or state legislation making public school buildings available for adult education programs free of charge (81.7%)

Increased funding for adult education in rural areas (80.6%)

Federal and state support for student loans and work-study programs for college-bound adult learners (80.0%)

Alternatives to enrollment-driven funding formulas for educational programs that serve rural adults (80.0%)

Re-allocation of funds from obsolete rural education programs to new programs that meet current needs (80.0%)

Support for state, regional, or national consortia for satellite programs (79.4%)

Policy to encourage lifelong learning (78.9%)

Subsidies to rural continuing education courses so that courses need not be self-supporting (77.7%)

Support creation of networks of electronically-linked colleges and universities within and among states that would offer joint programs for rural adults (77.7%)

Adequate funding for rural libraries and media resource centers (76.6%)

Recognition at the highest levels of federal and state governments that rural adults are an important resource

and that educational programs are necessary for developing that resource to fulfill its potential (76.6%)

On-the-job training for welfare recipients (75.4%)

State commitment to support lifelong learning for all persons (75.4%)

Forty-eight statements were similarly judged by 50 to 74 percent of the respondents. Those policies are listed below with the percent of respondents who rated them "important" or "most important" shown in parentheses.

State funding of adult education as part of the minimum foundation program (74.3%)

Guarantee of equal access to education, regardless of place of residence (72.6%)

Requirement that public entities, such as cities, counties, school districts, and post secondary institutions, work together in the best interests of adults in rural communities (72.6%)

A policy that fosters or requires coordination and cooperation among school districts in providing educational opportunities for rural adults (72.6%)

State support of viable educational television networks that reach all residents (72.0%)

Federal grants to establish innovative educational programs in rural areas (72.0%)

State and national goals for the educational development of rural adults based on the needs of society and of individuals (72.0%)

Open high school programs, especially vocational courses, to adult learners (71.3%)

Community development programs to stimulate community and personal growth (70.9%)

Tax incentives to stimulate public-private partnerships in rural adult education programs (70.9%)

Policies to stimulate collaborative programs involving K-12 and postsecondary educational institutions (70.3%)

Encouragement of rural education options in teacher preparation programs (69.7%)

Federal assistance to states to establish alternative delivery systems in rural areas (69.7%)

Elimination of unnecessary duplication of programs among post secondary institutions in each state (69.7%)

Recognition of comparable experience as equal to academic credentials in the qualifications of instructors for rural adults (69.1%)

Funding for research and demonstration of innovative rural educational programs (68.0%)

Federal or state financial support for adult community education programs conducted by school districts and/or community colleges (66.3%)

Equalize financial aid for part-time and full-time post secondary students (65.1%)

Expand Cooperative Extension Service, Vo-Tech, and Rural Development programs (64.6%)

Public funding of learning centers for rural adults (64.0%)

State guarantee to provide a free high school education to all adults who have not received one (64.0%)

Support networks of regional adult education centers (63.6%)

Guaranteed student loans for off-campus, non-classroom, and technology-facilitated education (62.3%)

Multi-year legislative commitments to fund educational programs for rural adults, rather than annual budgets and appropriations (62.3%)

Equitable taxation of rural and non-rural residents (62.3%)

Requirement that educational programming be based on demonstrated and documented needs of communities (61.7%)

Federal or state matching funds for investments in new high-tech industries to provide job and human relations training for residents of affected rural communities (61.7%)

Strengthen community college systems (61.1%)

An official definition of "rural" upon which to base legislation to provide educational opportunities for rural adults who presently have no access to postsecondary educational institutions (61.1%)

Restructure the governance of postsecondary educational institutions to assure coordination of and accessibility of adult education within each state (60.6%)

Requirement that a certain proportion of state and federal funds for education be directed toward educational programs for adults in rural communities (60.6%)

Subsidies for families involved in job retraining programs (60.0%)

Require every rural area to be included in a higher education service district (60.0%)

Legislative mandate to post secondary education institutions to provide programs in rural areas (58.9%)

Tax-supported job placement services for adults who increase their skills through education (58.3%)

A mandate to evaluate and develop the human resources of rural areas so that rural people can participate fully in the economy of the future (58.3%)

Financial assistance to rural adult learners (57.7%)

Expansion of the mission of the Cooperative Extension Service to meet a wider range of educational needs of rural adults (57.7%)

Allow local governments to tax and spend for postsecondary education programs in their own communities (57.1%)

Allow Native American communities to develop their own programs to match their needs (55.4%)

Certification, or other official recognition, of qualified instructors within rural communities (55.4%)

Student financial aid based on cash flow, rather than value of assets held (53.7%)

Create a clearinghouse for information on the rural adult learner (53.1%)

Federal support for research on facilitating learning in isolated rural areas (53.1%)

Public funding for curriculum development (51.4%)

Tax credits for expenses incurred for continuing adult education (50.9%)

Program of public recognition to reward adult learners (50.9%)

Require participation in educational programs by rural adults on public assistance (50.3%)

Only 19 of the policies were considered "important" or "most important" by less than 50 percent of the participants. Those policiy statements are listed below with the percent of respondents who thought them "important" or "most important" shown in parentheses:

A rural transportation policy to provide public transportation to residents of all ages in all rural communities and rural areas (29.1%)

Public funding for child care for rural adult students (42.3%)

State mandated requirement that local school districts provide educational programs for rural adults (46.3%)

Sabbaticals for all workers (24.0%)

Reverse public high school attendance and grade requirements that may be contributing to dropping out (38.3%)

Require more educational programming as public service responsibilties of commercial broadcasters (45.1%)

Consolidation of rural school districts (41.1%)

Requirement that instructors of rural adults be specifically trained for that work (43.4%)

Increased reliance on user fees to support the cost of adult education in rural communities (38.9%)

Mandatory master planning for adult education (45.7%)

Relaxation of teacher certification requirements to allow qualified workers to teach job skills in for-credit educational programs (44.6%)

Publicly-supported services for the professional development of beginning rural teachers (49.1%)

Mandate central coordination of institutions of higher education, vocational-technical schools, and community colleges (49.1%)

Tuition waivers for senior citizens or anyone taking rural continuing education courses (39.4%)

Mandate that all school districts serve the needs of adult learners (38.3%)

Higher salaries for teachers of rural adults (49.7%)

Tax increase to generate revenue to support rural adult education (43.4%)

Requirement that rural adult recipients of student financial aid apply their new skills within rural communities for a specified period of time (32.6%)

Limit expenditures of state funds to only those rural communities that demonstrate a willingness to support adult education through local taxes (32.0%)

Differences in Perceptions of Importance

Chi square analyses were conducted for each of the 89 policiy statements to determine whether there were significant differences (.05 level) among the respondents in

their perceptions of importance that were related to their geographic locations. A 4 x 3 factorial design was used. Responses to the policy statements were collapsed into four categories: 0 = no response, 1 = "Unimportant" or "Most Unimportant," 2 = "Moderately Important," and 3 = "Important" or "Most Important." The 13-state area was divided into three sub-regions: 1. Plains States (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas), 2. Mountain States (Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada), and 3. Northwest Coast States (Alaska, Washington, and Oregon). Chi squares with probabilities of occurring by chance of five percent or less were obtained for only six of the 89 policy statements.

On the statement, "Federal and state support for student loans and work-study programs for college-bound adult learners," 69 percent of Mountain states participants rated the statement "important" or "most important" compared to 89 percent and 93 percent of Plains and Northwest Coast states respondents, respectively. Only 64 percent of Mountain states participants judged "Guarantee of equal access to education, regardless of place of residence" as "important" or "most important" while over 80 percent of Plains and Northwest Coast states did. Similarly, only 53 percent of the Mountain states respondents considered "State guarantee to provide a free high school education to all adults who have not received one" as either "important" or

"most important" while nearly three-fourths of the other respondents did.

Respondents from Alaska, Washington, and Oregon were less supportive of "Federal support for research on facilitating learning in islolated rural areas" than were those from the other two subregions; about 49 percent of the Northwest sample rated that policy as "important" or "most important" compared to 52 percent and 56 percent for the Plains and Mountain sub-regions, respectively. On the policy, "Limit expenditures of state funds to only those rural communities that demonstrate a willingness to support adult education through local taxes," 53 percent of the participants from the Northwest Coast states said it was either "unimportant" or "most unimportant" while over 60 percent of respondents from the other two sub-regions found it "moderately important" to "most important." There was a high level of support (89 %) among all participants for the policy, "State commitment to adult basic education," but 100 percent of the Northwest Coast respondents rated it as "important" or "most important" compared to about 85 percent of the other respondents.

Chi square analyses were also conducted to determine whether there were significant differences (.05 level) in the perceived importance of the proposed policies among the respondents related to the different roles they played in rural education. A 4 x 8 factorial design was used.

Responses to the policy statements were collapsed into four categories: 0 = no response, 1 = "Unimportant" or "Most Unimportant," 2 = "Moderately Important," 3 = "Important" or "Most Important." The participants were divided into eight categories: 1. legislators, 2. adult educators, 3. college and university faculty and administrators, 4. Cooperative Extension Service personnel, 5. rural school teachers and administrators, 6. regional educational service agency (RESA) personnel, 7. state education (SEA) agency personnel, and 8. others. Significant chi squares were obtained for 16 of the 89 policy statements.

Most respondents rated "Federal assistance to states to establish alternative delivery systems in rural areas" as "important" or "most important;" however, only 50 percent of the legislators and rural educators did. About 80 percent of the college and university personnel and RESA staff thought the proposed policy was important.

Just over one-half of the participants judged "tax credits for expenses incurred for continuing adult education" as "important" or "most important," but only about one-fifth of the RESA agreed. "A rural transportation policy to provide public transportation to residents of all ages in all rural communities and rural areas" received a favorable rating from less than one-third of all respondents, although 40 percent of adult educators thought it important. Opinions differed, also, over "public funding

for child care for rural adult students;" about 60 percent of the adult educators and "others" thought that proposal was important, but only 21 percent of rural teachers and administrators and 42 percent of all respondents did.

A strong majority of all respondents, including 86 percent of the adult educators, rated "public funding of learning centers for rural adults" as "important" or "most important," but only 36 percent of rural educators did. Similarly, 86 percent of the adult educators thought a public policy of "financial assistance to rural adult learners" was important, while only about 40 percent of RESA and SEA personnel and less than 30 percent of rural educators thought so. Eighty percent of all respondents said that "Federal and state support for student loans and work-study programs for college-bound learners" was an important policy proposal, but less than 60 percent of state education agency personnel did.

Over one-half of the college and university faculty and administrators and "others" in the survey judged the policy, "require more educational programming as public service responsibilities of commercial broadcasters," as important, while less than 43 percent of all other respondents did. "Adequate funding for rural libraries and media resource centers" received a favorable importance rating from about three-fourths of all respondents, but only one-fourth of the legislators in the survey were in accord with the majority.

Only 24 percent of the state education agency personnel respondents considered "expansion of the mission of the Cooperative Extension Service to meet a wider range of educational needs of rural adults" important, while at least 50 percent of all other respondents and over 70 percent of the adult educators, Cooperative Extension Service personnel, and rural educators did. Nearly two-thirds of all respondents and all of the legislators judged "Federal or state financial support for adult community education programs conducted by school districts and/or community colleges" as important; however, less than one-half of the Cooperative Extension Service personnel agreed. More than one-half of all respondents, including 64 percent of the rural teachers and school administrators and 72 percent of the "others" said that "Federal support for research on facilitating learning in isolated rural areas" was important, but only 40 percent of the adult educators and Cooperative Extension personnel thought so.

A solid majority (61%) of all participants evaluated "strengthen community college systems" as important; however, only 42 percent of the Cooperative Extension Service people did. All of the RESA respondents and more than three-fourths of the adult educators, college and university personnel, rural educators, and SEA officials regarded the policy, "provide rent-free space in public educational facilities for adult basic education programs,"

as important, but only one-half of the legislators agreed. A "state guarantee to provide a free high school education to all adults who have not received one" received a favorable importance rating from 82 percent of the SEA and 76 percent of the college and university personnel, but only about one-half of the legislators, Cooperative Extension personnel, and RESA staff concurred.

Only 50 percent of the legislators and 64 percent of the rural school personnel found "increased funding for adult education in rural areas" important, while at least 80 percent of the adult educators, college and university personnel, RESA staff members, and "others" said that it was important. Overall, a solid 80 percent of the respondents thought that proposed policy was important.

Feasibility of the Proposed Policies

The respondents also evaluated the feasibility of the 89 policy proposals. None of the 89 policy statements were considered either "probably feasible" or "definitely feasible" by as many as 75 percent of the respondents. Twenty-six of the proposed policies were rated as feasible by between 50 and 74 percent of the respondents. Of these 26 policies, 14 were rated as "important" or "most important" by 75 percent of the respondents, 12 by 50 to 74 percent of the respondents. Those policies are listed below with the percent of respondents who considered them

"probably feasible" or "definitely feasible" shown in parentheses:

Policy to encourage lifelong learning (70.9%)

State commitment to adult basic education (69.7%)

Provide rent-free space in pulbic educational facilities for adult basic education programs (66.9%)

Reciprocity among colleges and universities serving rural areas so that credits may be easily transferred and applied to degree programs (66.3%)

Federal and state commitments to adult literacy programs (64.6%)

Federal and state support for student loans and work-study programs for college-bound adult learners (63.4%)

On-the-job training for welfare recipients (62.9%)

Coordinate educational programs for adults with current and projected demand for job skills (62.9%)

Encouragement of rural education options in teacher preparation programs (62.3%)

Program of public recognition to reward adult learners (60.0%)

Recognition of comparable experience as equal to academic credentials in the qualifications of instructors for rural adults (60.0%)

Community development programs to stimulate community and personal growth (59.4%)

Create a clearinghouse for information on the rural adult learner (59.4%)

Support creation of networks of electronically-linked colleges and universities within and among states that would offer joint programs for rural adults (59.4%)

State support of viable educational television networks that reach all residents (58.3%)

School board policies or state legislation making public school buildings available for adult education programs free of charge (57.7%)

Support for state, regional, or national consortia for satellite programs (57.1%)

Recognition at the highest levels of federal and state governments that rural adults are an important resource and that educational programs are necessary for developing that resource to fulfill its potential (56.6%)

Certification, or other official recognition, of qualified instructors within rural communities (56.0%)

Reverse current public assistance policy that penalizes adults on AFDC who wish to obtain further education (55.4%)

Open high school programs, especially vocational courses, to adult learners (55.4%)

Federal grants to establish innovative educational programs in rural areas (53.1%)

Funding for research and demonstration of innovative rural educational programs (52.6%)

Removal from public assistance programs of provisions that penalize adults for enrolling in educational programs (52.0%)

Policies to stimulate collaborative programs involving K-12 and postsecondary educational institutions (51.4%)

Equalize financial aid for part-time and full-time post secondary students (50.3%)

Some policies, however, that were judged to be important were considered feasible by less than 50 percent of the survey participants. Eight of the 22 policies that were evaluated as "important" or "most important" by at least 75 percent of the participants were identified as "probably feasible" or "definitely feasible" by less than 50

percent of the respondents. Those policies are listed below with the percent of respondents who found them "probably feasible" or "definitely feasible" shown in parentheses:

Re-allocation of funds from obsolete rural education programs to new programs that meet current needs (46.3%)

State subsidies for educational services in sparsely-populated areas (45.7%)

Equal educational opportunity for all residents of a state (45.7%)

Alternatives to enrollment-driven funding formulas for educational programs that serve rural adults (42.9%)

State commitment to support lifelong learning for all persons (42.3%)

Subsidies to rural continuing education courses so that courses need not be self-supporting (41.1%)

Adequate funding for rural libraries and media resource centers (38.3%)

Increased funding for adult education in rural areas (35.4%)

Three-fourths of the policies that were rated important by 50 to 74 percent of the respondents were found to be "probably feasible" or "definitely feasible" by less than one-half of them. Those policy statements are listed below with the percent of respondents who considered each of them as "probably feasible" or "definitely feasible" shown in parentheses:

A policy that fosters or requires coordination and cooperation among school districts in providing educational opportunities for rural adults (49.7%)

An official definition of "rural" upon which to base legislation to provide educational opportunities for

rural adults who presently have no access to postsecondary educational institutions (49.7%)

Expansion of the mission of the Cooperative Extension Service to meet a wider range of educational needs of rural adults (48.6%)

Allow Native American communities to develop their own programs to match their needs (47.4%)

State and national goals for the educational development of rural adults based on the needs of society and of individuals (47.4%)

Tax-supported job placement services for adults who increase their skills through education (46.3%)

Tax incentives to stimulate public-private partnerships in rural adult education programs (44.6%)

Elimination of unnecessary duplication of programs among post secondary institutions in each state (44.6%)

Require every rural area to be included in a higher education service district (43.4%)

Requirement that educational programming be based on demonstrated and documented needs of communities (42.9%)

State funding of adult education as part of the minimum foundation program (42.3%)

Strengthen community college systems (42.3%)

Support networks of regional adult education centers (42.3%)

Expand Cooperative Extension Service, Vo-Tech, and Rural Development programs (41.1%)

Requirement that public entities, such as cities, counties, school districts, and post secondary institutions, work together in the best interests of adults in rural communities (40.6%)

Federal assistance to states to establish alternative delivery systems in rural areas (38.9%)

Financial assistance to rural adult learners (38.3%)

Tax credits for expenses incurred for continuing adult education (37.7%)

Allow local governments to tax and spend for postsecondary education programs in their own communities (36.0%)

Guaranteed student loans for off-campus, non-classroom, and technology-facilitated education (35.4%)

Federal support for research on facilitating learning in isolated rural areas (35.4%)

State guarantee to provide a free high school education to all adults who have not received one (35.4%)

Public funding of learning centers for rural adults (34.9%)

Subsidies for families involved in job retraining programs (34.9%)

Federal or state financial support for adult community education programs conducted by school districts and/or community colleges (34.9%)

Federal or state matching funds for investments in new high-tech industries to provide job and human relations training for residents of affected rural communities (34.3%)

Legislative mandate to post secondary education institutions to provide programs in rural areas (33.7%)

Restructure the governance of postsecondary educational institutions to assure coordination of and accessibility of adult education within each state (32.6%)

Student financial aid based on cash flow, rather than value of assets held (32.6%)

Public funding for curriculum development (31.4%)

A mandate to evaluate and develop the human resources of rural areas so that rural people can participate fully in the economy of the future (30.9%)

Equitable taxation of rural and non-rural residents (30.9%)

Guarantee of equal access to education, regardless of place of residence (30.3%)

Requirement that a certain proportion of state and federal funds for education be directed toward educational programs for adults in rural communities (30.3%)

Require participation in educational programs by rural adults on public assistance (26.9%)

Multi-year legislative commitments to fund educational programs for rural adults, rather than annual budgets and appropriations (25.7%)

Nineteen of the proposed public policies were regarded as important or feasible by less than one-half of the participants. Those policies are listed below with the percent of respondents who regarded each of them as "probably feasible" or "definitely feasible" shown in parentheses:

Increased reliance on user fees to support the cost of adult education in rural communities (42.3%)

Requirement that instructors of rural adults be specifically trained for that work (38.3%)

Require more educational programming as public service responsibilties of commercial broadcasters (36.6%)

Tuition waivers for senior citizens or anyone taking rural continuing education courses (36.6%)

Publicly-supported services for the professional development of beginning rural teachers (36.0%)

Relaxation of teacher certification requirements to allow qualified workers to teach job skills in for-credit educational programs (34.9%)

Mandatory master planning for adult education (34.3%)

Consolidation of rural school districts (32.0%)

Mandate central coordination of institutions of higher education, vocational-technical schools, and community colleges (32.0%)

Reverse public high school attendance and grade requirements that may be contributing to dropping out (26.9%)

Higher salaries for teachers of rural adults (25.1%)

State mandated requirement that local school districts provide educational programs for rural adults (23.4%)

Public funding for child care for rural adult students (20.6%)

Requirement that rural adult recipients of student financial aid apply their new skills within rural communities for a specified period of time (20.6%)

Limit expenditures of state funds to only those rural communities that demonstrate a willingness to support adult education through local taxes (18.9%)

Mandate that all school districts serve the needs of adult learners (16.0%)

Sabbaticals for all workers (10.3%)

Tax increase to generate revenue to support rural adult education (7.4%)

A rural transportation policy to provide public transportation to residents of all ages in all rural communities and rural areas (5.1%)

Differences in Perceptions of Feasibility

Chi square analyses were conducted for each of the 89 policy proposals to determine whether there were significant differences (.05 level) among the repondents in their perceptions of feasiblity that were related to their geographic locations. A 4 x 3 factorial design was used. Responses to the policy statements were collapsed into four categories: 0 = no response, 1 = "Probably Infeasible" or

"Definitely Infeasible," 2 = "May or May Not be Feasible," and 3 = "Probably Feasible" or "Definitely Feasible." The 13-state area was divided into three sub-regions (Plains States, Mountain States, and Northwest Coast States) as described earlier in this paper. Significant chi square values were obtained for only seven of the 89 proposed policies. None of those seven public policy proposals was judged to be feasible by as many as 50 percent of all respondents.

Nearly one-half of the Plains states respondents thought that "public funding of learning centers for rural adults" was "probably feasible" or "definitely feasible," while only 28 percent of the Mountain states participants and 37 percent of the Northwest coast respondents thought so. A strong majority (65 percent) of respondents from the Plains regarded a policy of "equal educational opportunity for all residents of a state" as feasible, but only 41 percent of the participants from the Mountain states and 34 percent of those from the Northwest coast concurred. Fifty percent of the participants from the Plains said that a "guarantee of equal access to education, regardless of place of residence," was either probably or definitely feasible, but only 17 percent of the Northwest coast respondents and 26 percent of the Mountain states residents who answered agreed.

The proposed policy, "requirement that public entities, such as cities, counties, school districts, and post secondary institutions, work together in the best interests of adults in rural communities," received positive feasibility ratings from 51 percent of the Northwest coast participants , but from only 34 percent of the Mountain states respondents and 44 percent of those from the Plains. A "requirement that instructors of rural adults be specifically trained for that work" was considered to be feasible by nearly one-half of the participants from the Plains, but by only about one-third and two-fifths of the Mountain and Northwest respondents, respectively.

Only 35 percent of all survey respondents regarded "Federal or state financial support for adult community education programs conductecd by school districts and/or community colleges" as at least probably feasible; however, 61 percent of the Plains participants, compared to 46 percent of those from the Northwest coast and 35 percent of those from the Mountain states, were uncertain as to the feasibility of that proposed policy. A "tax increase to generate revenue to support rural adult education" was judged feasible by only 35 percent of all respondents; fifty percent of those from the Plains thought that proposal was feasible, but only 25 percent of the Mountain states participants and 42 percent of those from the Northwest agreed.

Chi square analyses were also conducted to determine whether there were significant differences (.05 level) in the perceived feasibility of the proposed policies among the respondents related to the different roles they played in rural education. A 4 x 8 factorial design was used. Responses to the policy statements were collapsed into four categories as listed above. The participants were divided into eight role categories as previously described in this paper. Significant chi squares were obtained for 15 of the 89 policy statements.

Only 39 percent of all respondents thought that "Federal assistance to states to establish alternative delivery systems in rural areas" was a feasible policy proposal, but 70 percent of the RESA personnel responded that it was, while only 16 percent of the Cooperative Extension agents agreed. "A rural transportation policy to provide public transportation to residents of all ages in all rural communities and rural areas" was considered feasible by only five percent of all survey respondents and at least 66 percent of all groups, except the legislators, thought it was probably or definitely infeasible; however, 25 percent of the legislators indicated that it was probably or definitely feasible. Thirty-five percent of all respondents judged "subsidies for families involved in job retraining programs" to be feasible, while only seven percent of rural school personnel and 10 percent of RESA

professionals thought so. On the other hand, 56 percent of those in the "other" category indicated that policy was either probably or definitely feasible.

Sixty percent of the RESA staff participants and 50 percent of the legislators found it feasible to "require more educational programming as public service responsibilities of commercial broadcasters," but only 27 percent of the Cooperative Extension personnel and 29 percent of the adult educators did. A policy to "create a clearinghouse for information on the rural adult learner" was considered feasible by 60 percent of all respondents, including 90 percent of the RESA staff persons, 86 percent of the adult educators, and 83 percent of the "others," but only one-fourth of the legislators shared that view. A "requirement that instructors of rural adults be specifically trained for that work" was perceived as feasible by 38 percent of all respondents, but three-fourths of the legislators regarded it so while only about one-fifth of the rural teachers and administrators agreed. About one-third of all respondents thought that "student financial aid based on cash flow, rather than value of assets held," was a feasible policy, but three-fourths of the legislators thought so; however, only 12 percent of state education agency personnel agreed. "Guaranteed student loans for off-campus, non-classroom, and technology- facilitated education" was regarded as probably or definitely feasible

by 70 percent of the RESA respondents, but only 35 percent of all respondents, including only 12 percent of "others" and 17 percent of state education agency personnel, held that perception.

Nearly one-half of all respondents, including three-fourths of the legislators, evaluated "expansion of the mission of the Cooperative Extension Service to meet a wider range of educational needs of rural adults" as feasible, but only 24 percent of the SEA personnel and 36 percent of the college and university personnel concurred. Over one-third of all respondents, including 50 percent of the RESA personnel and 56 percent of "others," said that "Federal or state financial support for adult community education programs conducted by school districts and/or community colleges" was at least probably feasible, but only 13 percent of the Cooperative Extension Service personnel were in accord. Forty-three percent of the adult educators responding to the survey indicated that to "mandate that all school districts serve the needs of adult learners" was a feasible policy proposal; however, only 16 percent of all respondents said so. A proposal to "strengthen community college systems" was rated as feasible by 42 percent of all respondents, including nearly 80 percent of "others," but only about one-fourth of the legislators and SEA personnel regarded it so.

"Higher salaries for teachers of rural adults" was judged a feasible policy by only about one-fourth of all respondents, including only eight percent of Cooperative Extension personnel, although 36 percent of the college and university faculty and administrators perceived the proposal as at least probably feasible. One-half of the legislators and rural school personnel thought that "Federal or state matching funds for investments in new high-tech industries to provide job and human relations training for residents of affected rural communities" was a feasible policy proposal; however, only 14 percent of the adult educators, 21 percent of the Cooperative Extension personnel, and 34 percent of all respondents thought so. "An official definition of 'rural' upon which to base legislation to provide educational opportunities for rural adults who presently have no access to post secondary educational institutions" was judged a feasible proposal by 71 percent of the adult educators responding and by close to 60 percent of the college and university personnel, rural school personnel, and RESA staff members, but only one-third of the SEA staff members and one-fourth of the legislators agreed.

Conclusions

Each of the policy statements considered in this study was regarded as important and feasible by someone. The 175 participants in the third round of this modified Delphi survey identified 26 of the 89 public policy proposals aimed

at improving access to education for rural adults as both important and feasible. Eight of the proposed policies were judged important by no less than 75 percent of the respondents, but were thought to be feasible by less than one-half of the participants. There were relatively few statistically-significant differences in perceptions associated with the geographic location of the respondents. There were 31 statistically-significant differences of opinion related to the differing roles of the respondents in rural education.

Discussion

The 26 policy ideas that were considered both important and feasible by a majority of participants in this study would appear to form an appropriate agenda for discussion by policymakers across the 13-state region. They include proposals for consideration by both federal and state officials in the areas of education, welfare, job training and placement, and community development. It is noteworthy that a strong majority of the respondents rated "policy to encourage lifelong learning," "state commitment to adult basic education," and "federal and state commitments to adult literacy programs" as both important and feasible. Those statements simply call for governmental commitments to adult education. Participants seemed to be saying that such commitments were lacking and would be a good place to begin developing a comprehensive policy on adult education that

would increase access to educational programs for all adult learners, including those who live in rural communities.

Another agenda suggested by this study consists of the 44 policy proposals that were considered important by a majority of the respondents, but feasible by less than one-half of them. Energies might be invested in seeking ways to make more feasible ideas such as "state subsidies for educational services in sparsely-populated areas," "alternatives to enrollment-driven funding formulas for educational programs that serve rural adults," and "equal educational opportunity for all residents of a state."

The composition of this group of respondents, persons representing higher education, rural education, adult education, regional educational service agencies, state education authorities, the Cooperative Extension Service, and state legislatures, hints at the nature of panels that might be convened to develop federal, state, and regional policies aimed at reducing barriers to adult education for rural residents. Since most of the significant differences of opinion in this study were associated with the diverse roles the respondents played in the educational system, it might be useful to facilitate face-to-face deliberations among similarly-comprised groups in order to develop agendas for action in each of the states and subregions represented in this study. These constituencies might also be involved in efforts to shape and influence policy at the federal

level and across state lines through interstate compacts. In addition, it would seem appropriate to include rural participants in adult education programs, a group that was not ostensibly included in this study.

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